

# KING COUNTY EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PARKS COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT



The  
Wilderness  
Society



King County

**PARKS**

Your Big Backyard



Sustainable Solutions for All



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## FUNDING

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## COLLABORATING PARTNERS

### Roundtable Hosts



### Golden Bricks Events

Represented by Chevon Powell

GBE is an event production company addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoors. Through consulting, event management, and creating signature events such as the Refuge Outdoor Festival and Sundaes Outside; GBE is committed to getting 10k people of color outside by 2022.



### Living Well Kent

Represented by Hoda Abdullahi and Thania Guerra

Living Well Kent Collaborative is a community-based organization united to achieve health equity through policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change! We build community through Collaboration, Communication, Engagement, Promotion, Education, and Advocacy.



### ECOSS

Represented by Will Chen, Liza Boardman, Kevin Duong, and Oni Curitol Jaque

ECOSS educates and empowers businesses and diverse communities to implement environmentally sustainable practices. A leader in equitable community engagement, ECOSS connects industry, government agencies and communities to deliver resources and education on water quality, resource conservation, clean energy, environmental stewardship and more. As a multinational team with a capacity of 12+ languages, ECOSS brings cultural depth and relationships to authentic community outreach.



## Young Women Empowered

Represented by Lucia Santos, Savannah Blackwell, and Rae Parks

Y-WE's mentorship-based empowerment programs serve diverse young women ages 13-26, and adult women mentors in the greater Seattle area. With learning and leadership programs that center marginalized young women, Y-WE provides empowerment programs for young women so that they will become leaders who effect positive change in their communities.



## GirlTrek

Represented by Trina Baker

GirlTrek is the largest public health nonprofit for African-American women and girls in the United States. With 1 million members, GirlTrek encourages women to use walking as a practical first step to inspire healthy living, families, and communities. GirlTrek's members also support local and national policy to improve access to safe places to walk, protect and reclaim green spaces, and improve the walkability and built environments of high-need communities.

## Survey Partners



### Latino Outdoors

Represented by Alfonso Orozco and Allen Cardenas

Latino Outdoors inspires, connects, and engages Latino communities in the outdoors and embraces cultura y familia as part of the outdoor narrative, ensuring our history, heritage, and leadership are valued and represented. Our community's voices are varied while remaining united in celebrating diversity and declaring it a core tenet of Latino Outdoors.



outdoor asian

### Outdoor Asian

Represented by Chris Liu, Daniel Kim, and Kaiwen Lee

Outdoor Asian's vision is to create a diverse and inclusive community of Asian and Pacific Islanders in the outdoors. Our relationship with nature is multifaceted and ever-evolving. We gather around the fire to share stories with each other and build friendship.



## **Partner in Employment**

Represented by Hien Kieu

PIE works to guarantee the long-term economic stability of newly arrived refugees and immigrants in south King County by providing tailored assistance in language acquisition, housing stabilization, workforce entry, and job training in higher-wage industries.



## **YMCA BOLD & GOLD**

Represented by Robin Chiles

Boys and Girls Outdoor Leadership Development or BOLD & GOLD fosters a sense of awe in the wilderness. BOLD & GOLD takes small, single gender groups of middle and high school students into the great outdoors without technology to discover what it means to truly connect for one-, two-, or three-week trips. And through these connections, their participants learn how to be great leaders.



## **African Young Dreamers Empowerment Program International**

Represented by Beatrice Kiraguri, Maurine Karichu, Fiona Okech, and Melat Assefa

AYDEPI works to build resilience in vulnerable immigrant Youth through holistic investment in the key areas of education, socio-economic interventions, mental health awareness, substance abuse and prevention, suicide prevention, crime, homelessness, and other psychosocial factors that significantly affect immigrant Youth in Washington State.



## **Disabled Hikers**

Represented by Syren Nagakyrie

Disabled Hikers is a project by disabled hikers for disabled hikers. We provide information and resources that will help you know what to expect on a trail and plan accordingly. Disabled Hikers envisions an outdoors culture transformed by fair representation, accessibility, and justice for disabled and all other marginalized outdoors people.

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Project Goals &amp; Outcomes</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Purpose and Need</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Project Overview</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Project Components</b>	<b>12</b>
Online Survey	13
Partner-led Roundtables	16
<b>Roundtable Results</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Findings &amp; Recommendations</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Opportunities Moving Forward</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>29</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Access to nature and the opportunity to safely experience parks and open space and nearby public lands is a fundamental right everyone should enjoy. Yet, too often, this experience is determined by race, place, ability, and income, with communities of color and low-income communities experiencing greater inequities. While King County has made bold commitments to open space equity through initiatives such as the landmark [Land Conservation Initiative](#) and innovative [Trailhead Direct shuttle service](#), access to parks, trails, and natural areas remains out of reach for many across the region, with south King County having some of the [greatest disparities](#).

As King County [centers equity and social justice](#) in all of its programming and services and commits to going “where needs are greatest,” finding solutions that will work for the communities most in need requires intentional and sustained engagement to more fully understand needs and challenges and to daylight opportunities for new investments and collaboration. Through

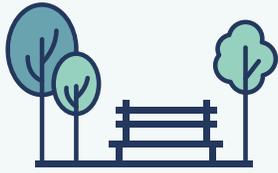
the King County Equitable Parks Access Community Needs Assessment, King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society aimed to put this principle into practice. The project team worked with 11 community-based organizations serving members of Black, Latinx, Asian, Muslim, youth, disabled, immigrant, and refugee communities, with an emphasis in south King County. Project partners identified challenges to reaching parks using transit and raised solutions that would help them safely and more easily access green space.

The community engagement project consisted of 6 community-led roundtables hosted by five local organizations involving more than 60 community members and an online survey that received nearly 400 responses. These efforts provided valuable insights into community needs and preferences to increase equitable access to parks and transit across King County and, importantly, provided King County and partners the opportunity to work together and engage the community in new ways.



<sup>1</sup> ECOSS, GirlTrek, Golden Bricks Events, Living Well Kent, Young Women Empowered, African Young Dreamers Empowerment Program International, YMCA BOLD & GOLD, Partner in Employment, Disabled Hikers, Outdoor Asian, and Latino Outdoors.

## Key takeaways:



**1**

People value parks and want them to be safe and welcoming for their communities.



**2**

Riding transit can be difficult in general, and especially to parks.



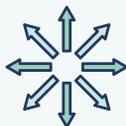
**3**

Safety in parks and on transit can be a deciding factor for using them.



**4**

Community members want more opportunities to engage with decision-makers and hold them accountable to community needs.



**5**

Intersections of identities affect how we use parks and transit – making these spaces inclusive will take more than an one-size-fits-all approach.



**6**

Incentivized participation encouraged more in-depth conversation and involvement.

## Community-sourced Themes and Recommendations



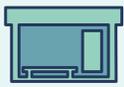
### Safety

- 1 Non-punitive visitor support
- 2 Reporting and tracking system for racial conflict with accountability on actions being taken
- 3 Inter-county and -agency coordination to address systemic issues



### Education and Outreach

- 1 Detailed and inclusive park information
- 2 Outreach and experiences tailored to BIPOC
- 3 Free and reduced costs for BIPOC



### Infrastructure

- 1 Expanded Metro service
- 2 More amenities and better maintenance
- 3 Co-design with community



### Access, Representation, and Inclusion

- 1 Inter-county and -agency coordination to address systemic issues
- 2 Hire folks from BIPOC communities to serve their communities
- 3 Work with Indigenous peoples on shared land management and land-back initiatives



### Engagement and Accountability

- 1 Compensate community participation
- 2 Availability and accountability of leadership
- 3 Non-transactional community outreach

Through this work, King County, in partnership with community leaders, organizers, and entities across the county, can continue to deliver on its commitment to improve equitable access to open space, regional trails, and transit. This project illuminates critical needs and preferences of communities in south King County and uplifts innovative community solutions to address inequities and other challenges. Early opportunities presented in this report — such as the [King County Open Space Plan](#), 2022 Trailhead Direct Season, [King County Metro SaFE Reform Initiative](#), King County Metro future pilot programs, and innovative collaborative campaigns to raise awareness and engage the community in culturally relevant ways — can help inform existing and future King County policy, programs, and partnerships. This report can serve as a foundation for sustained collaborative action and advocacy to better meet the open space and transit needs of south King County and deliver on the County’s commitment to advancing equity and justice for all communities.



## INTRODUCTION

King County has a strong legacy of protecting parks and natural areas that provide a variety of recreational experiences, from urban parks to community forests and regional trails to outdoor community spaces. Despite the county’s strong investments over many years, access to parks, trails, and natural areas remains inequitable across the region, with south King County having some of the [greatest disparities](#). The County has employed many strategies to address these inequities, most recently launching the County’s landmark [Land Conservation Initiative \(LCI\)](#), which commits to protecting the remaining most vital green spaces and trails in the next 25 years. Through the LCI, the County is investing more than \$160 million to create more equitable access to green space.

King County Metro has similarly committed to centering equity and social justice in its policy and programs to create a safe, just, and responsive transit system that goes where needs are greatest. Regional housing costs have pushed lower-income families and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities out to suburban areas, especially in south King County, where it can be harder to serve and connect people to the transit network and provide fast, frequent, and reliable transit. Metro has worked to address the service needs of transit riders in south King County in a number of ways, from increasing service shuttles such as Via to expanding King County’s Trailhead Direct service to Tukwila and Renton.

To further King County’s goals of improving equitable access to parks, trails, and transit, especially in south King County, King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society teamed up on a community needs assessment from December 2020-December 2021. The project worked directly with community members to better understand their needs and preferences, and to put forth co-created solutions to address inequities and challenges to providing safe and easy access to parks, trails, and natural areas in King County.

This report captures findings and takeaways from an online survey and six community-led roundtables. It identifies specific opportunity areas within King County’s services and conveys feedback and recommendations directly from concerned community members who took part in the roundtable conversations. King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society are hopeful this report serves as a foundation for collaborative action to better meet the park and transit needs of south King County and deliver on the county’s commitment to advancing equity and justice for all communities.



## PROJECT GOALS & OUTCOMES

- 1 Model a community-first engagement approach for King County** through working with trusted community-based partners and organizations to better understand and meet needs
- 2 Identify barriers to equitable access to parks, trails, and natural areas,** community preferences and concerns around outdoor recreation and transit, and preferred destinations for outdoor recreation opportunities
- 3 Uplift community solutions** for key issues related to equitable access to parks and transit
- 4 Lay the foundation for ongoing, meaningful partnerships** that create deeper dialogue and trust between community-based organizations and King County



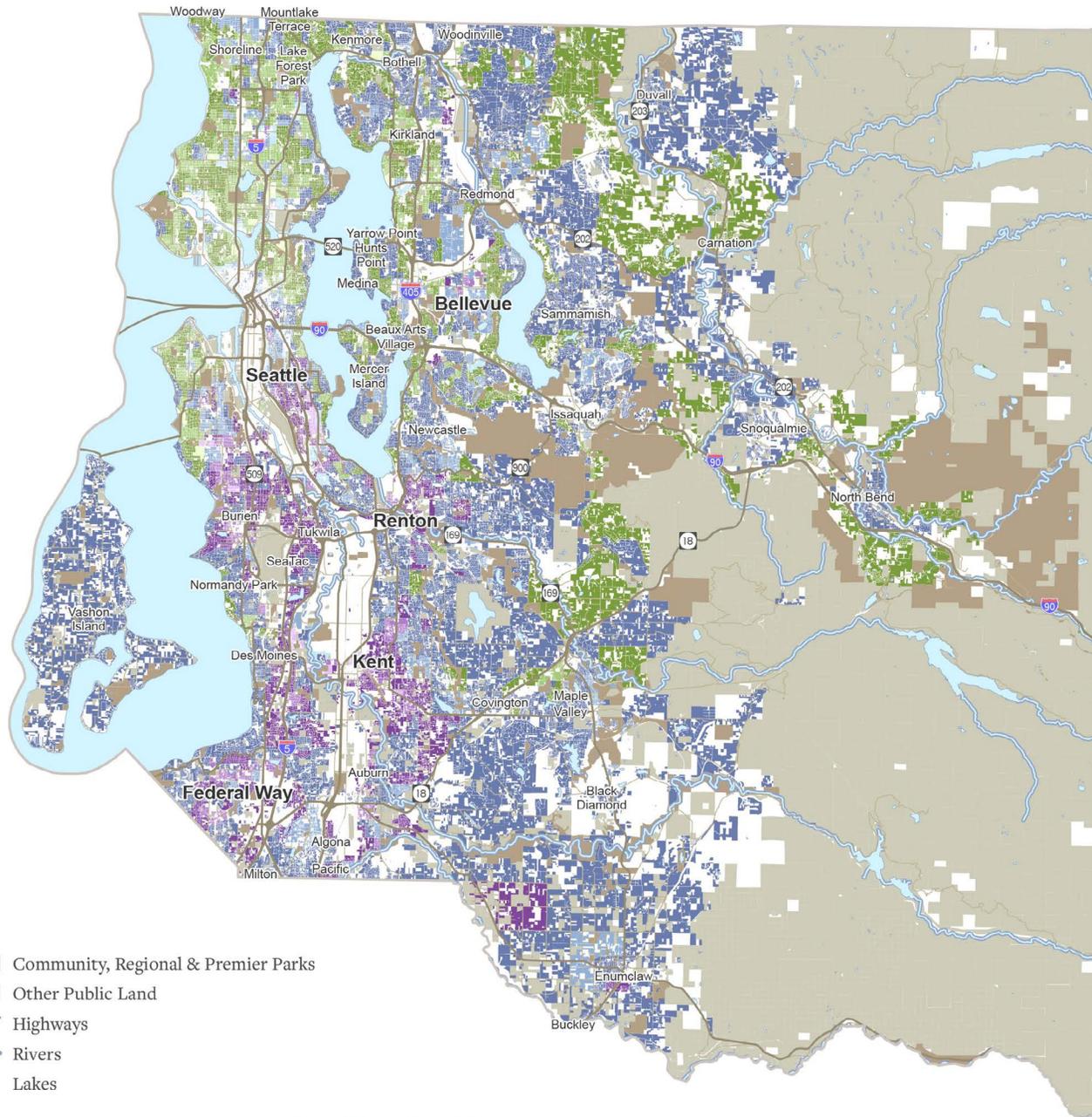


## PURPOSE AND NEED

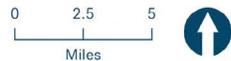
Access to nature and open space is foundational to our collective quality of life throughout the region. Nature provides us with many benefits, including positive mental and physical health outcomes, community-building opportunities, and mitigation of climate change effects, such as increased urban heat. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it even clearer that nature and the outdoors provide us with important opportunities to keep our minds and bodies healthy. Yet we know not all communities are able to enjoy these benefits equally.

National studies show that access to nature is not equitable and too often determined by race, place, and income. The Trust for Public Land’s [“The Heat is On”](#) report shows that parks are smaller and more crowded in lower-income communities and communities of color. The Center for American Progress’ [“The Nature Gap”](#) study shows that these disparities correlate with access to parks and nature as well. In King County, race and geographic location are the strongest determinants of poor park access. [According to a recent study by The Wilderness Society](#), 88% of Seattle residents can reach a local park within a half-mile, but only 45% of the rest of King County can, with large gaps in south King County, as shown in dark purple and blue in the map on page 8. On top of that, 67% of large parks are inaccessible via frequent transit on weekends.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The TWS transit-to-parks analysis defined “large parks” as Regional Parks (greater than 100 acres) and Community Parks (10-100 acres) based on Puget Sound Regional Council’s [Regional Open Space Conservation Plan](#) classifications. Frequent transit is defined as a bus coming every 15 minutes or less.



OCTOBER 26, 2021  
 SOURCE: US CENSUS, CDC, KING COUNTY METRO,  
 KING COUNTY HEALTH, PSRC, WSDOT, FORTERA, US EPA



## Equitable Transit Access to Parks

Modeled using transit data from Saturday, October 9, 2021

Total Population by Category of the Equitable Transit Access to Parks Index

### Transit Access to Parks

Good	32,049	96,976	19,202
Moderate	87,053	245,084	230,175
Poor	277,683	704,329	502,951
	High	Moderate	Low
	<i>Cumulative Impacts</i>		

**Transit access to parks is defined as follows:**

**Good:** Able to reach at least two Community or Regional parks, including one Premier park\*, within 30 minutes from doorstep to park

**Moderate:** Able to reach some combination of Community, Regional and Premier parks within 30 minutes, but not up to Good standard

**Poor:** No transit access to parks (unable to reach any Community or Regional parks within 30 minutes)

**Cumulative impact levels are defined as follows:**

**High:** Block group is in the top quartile for cumulative impacts (10 or more)

**Moderate:** Block group is in the middle two quartiles for cumulative impacts (4-9)

**Low:** Block group is in the lowest quartile for cumulative impacts (3 or fewer)

\*Community parks are 10-100 acres, Regional parks are over 100 acres, and Premier parks are a subset of Community and Regional parks that contain at least one of each of the following: passive amenity, active amenity, trail, picnic table, and restroom.

While King County has made significant commitments and investments to improve access to parks and open space for underserved communities, more and ongoing community engagement is needed to ensure public investments and projects are based on the needs of local communities. Programs like [Trailhead Direct](#) — a transit service that connects urban communities to popular regional hiking trails — have the opportunity to increase equitable access to nature if co-designed with community members.

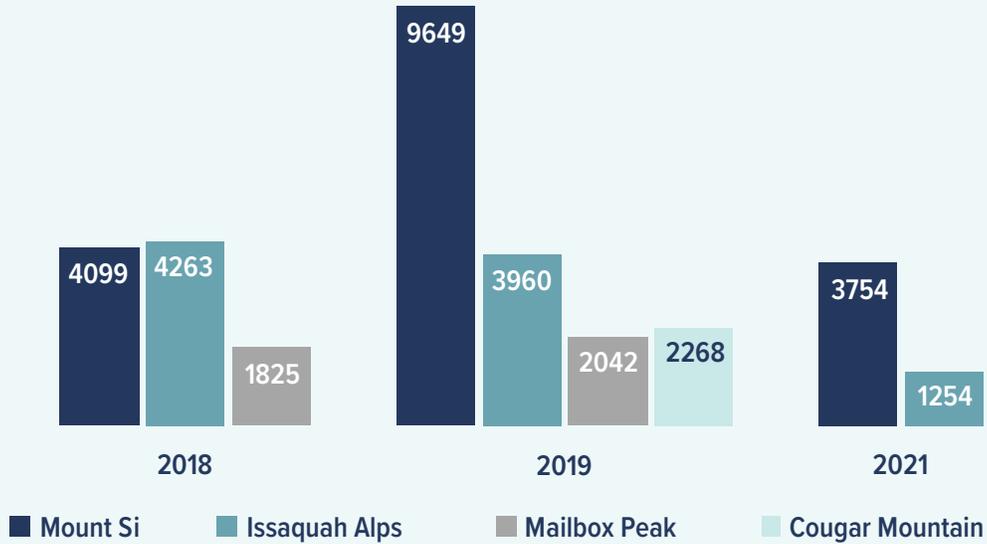
The community needs assessment was inspired by the convergence of the programming “pause” of Trailhead Direct service in response to the pandemic, a desire to build on the data-driven results of [The Wilderness Society’s transit-to-parks study](#), and King County Parks’ desire to engage authentically with communities in a new, collaborative way.

## About Trailhead Direct

Since 2017, Trailhead Direct has provided an efficient and cost-effective way to reach many of the plentiful trails and recreational opportunities that make our region unique. The first route was created to relieve dangerous parking congestion at popular trailheads along the I-90 corridor, and the program has since grown to encompass 4 routes to Issaquah Alps, Mt. Si, Mailbox Peak, and Cougar Mountain. Key community partner organizations, such as The Wilderness Society and ECOSS, also came on board to help King County Parks forge greater connections with community organizations and prioritize equitable access to trails. The Cougar Mountain route was added in 2019 as a result of this engagement with the community with the goal of better connecting south King County residents to trails.



### Trailhead Direct Roundtrips\*



*\* Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Trailhead Direct did not run in 2020. With health and safety in mind, Trailhead Direct operated for a shortened 2021 season with two routes. Ridership on Trailhead Direct in 2021 was proportionately higher as a percentage of 2019 ridership than Metro ridership overall.*

The emphasis on equitable access and community partnerships has contributed to the huge success of Trailhead Direct. In 2019, ridership increased by 75% from the previous year and King County residents looked forward to service continuation and potential expansion. The COVID-19 pandemic put the 2020 season on hold, but the program was able to start back up for a shortened season during the summer of 2021.

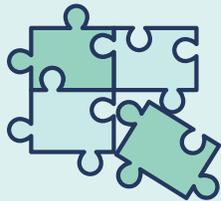


As we look ahead to the future of Trailhead Direct, we are guided by input from community members to make the service the best it can be. Trailhead Direct was a major catalyst for this community needs assessment to learn how community members want to experience parks and how transit can help meet those needs.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

This collaborative needs assessment is the product of a multi-year community engagement partnership between King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society to support Trailhead Direct. Together, our organizations have worked to support community-based organizations serving youth, BIPOC, immigrant, and refugee communities in south King County to utilize the Trailhead Direct service as part of each organization’s programming. These partnerships provided a strong foundation to build on by learning more about community needs, preferences, and opportunities to increase equitable access to nature and parks.

For this community needs assessment, King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society partnered with 11 community-based organizations to gather feedback through a series of partner-led roundtables and an online survey. The project team was guided by the feedback and consultation of community members, who co-designed 6 roundtables and a community survey, as well as helped with participant recruitment and promotion. When designing the framework for this project, the project team involved community members from beginning to end and compensated for their time and expertise. The project team de-emphasized their leadership role to center the agency of community members and focused on providing support, technical assistance, and guidance as requested. The project team also focused on maintaining open lines of communication and staying in contact to share progress and feedback. King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society approached the project with the aim to:



Co-design the project with trusted community members and community-based organizations



Acknowledge and compensate partners as consultants for their work and subject matter expertise



Make the process as inclusive and transparent as possible



Collaborate as much as possible with partners throughout the course of the project

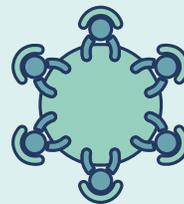
# Project Components



## Survey

**383 participants**

**9 languages**



## Partner-led Roundtables

**60 participants**

**6 roundtables**

**4 languages**

## Online Survey

To gather community input from across King County, the project team developed an online survey that gathered information from respondents on use of parks and transit, barriers and motivators for taking the bus to parks, and which parks, trails, and natural areas people wanted to visit. Ultimately, we received nearly 400 valid responses (note: we received more than 4,000 responses, but navigated significant challenges with invalid/false responses due to spam bots), gathered over the course of 4 weeks in June 2021.

In development of the online survey, the project team worked with 11 community-based organizations to design and test the survey to ensure everything from the user interface to language was relevant to their communities. Our partner organizations provided two rounds of feedback before we distributed the survey. Partner feedback provided critical guidance for the team, such as incorporating safety more explicitly into the questions and optimizing the layout for participants using screen readers. Through this approach, the team refined the survey content and platform and also translated the survey into French, Khmer, Chinese, Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Somali, and Swahili.

The project team paid partners for participating in the survey review and promoting it to their networks. The first part of the online survey period was reserved for community partners, with an added incentive that every participant that was referred by a community partner was guaranteed a \$10 gift card, before later opening up the online survey to the general public and employing a raffle model for the \$10 gift cards. The project team is confident this targeted distribution approach successfully engaged more BIPOC participants given the racial/ethnic diversity of survey respondents.

### Who responded to our survey?

Survey respondents were fairly frequent park users, with 25% visiting daily, 54% visiting weekly, and transit users, with almost 40% using transit daily/weekly (pre-COVID patterns).

The targeted distribution of the survey via community-based partners may have successfully engaged more BIPOC, given the racial/ethnic diversity of survey respondents. Respondents who answered the optional demographic questions are generally overrepresented by BIPOC than King County's overall population. Respondents are generally younger and identify as female than county average. Summary statistics include:

- **52% identified as white** vs. 66% countywide
- Nearly **40% identified as BIPOC**, with 8% preferring not to say
- **15% identified as Black** vs. 7% countywide
- **65% female** vs. 50% countywide
- **45% aged 26-45** vs. 32% countywide

## Survey Findings

The online survey gathered important information about how and why people visit parks, where individuals like to go, and how transit could increase equitable access to parks. Some important themes and takeaways include:

- **People visit parks to spend time in nature, relieve stress and support mental health, exercise, and spend time with family and friends.** While our sample sizes were smaller when broken down by race, ethnicity and age, some interesting findings include:
  - The #1 reason white respondents go to parks is to spend time in nature;
  - The #1 reason BIPOC respondents go to parks is to relieve stress; and
  - For respondents ages 26-45, the #1 reason is generally split between relieving stress and spending time in nature.

**What would encourage you to go to parks, trails, and natural areas in King County more often?**

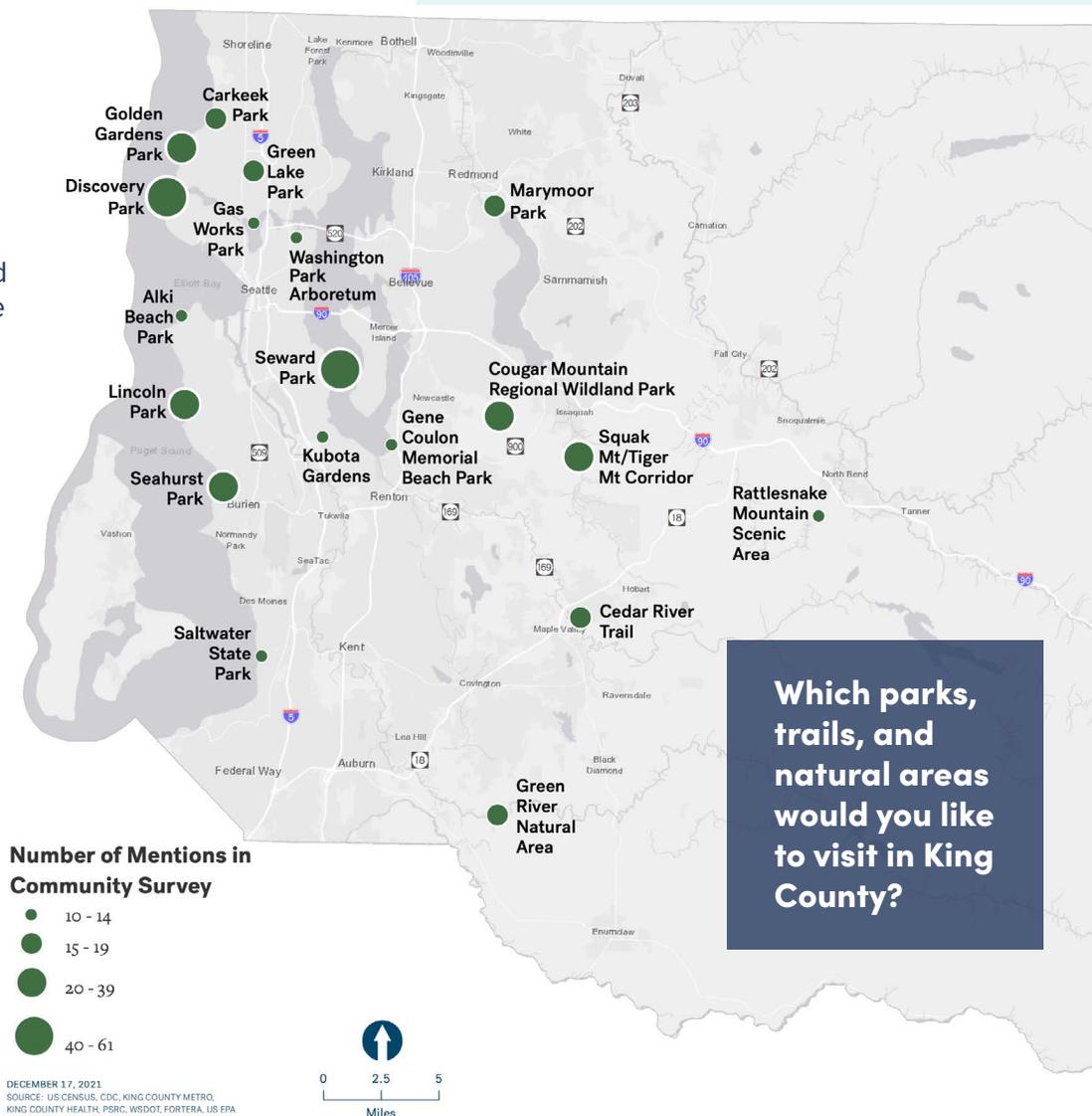
more events  
**more amenities**  
better accessibility  
better park maintenance  
**feeling safer at parks**  
more info at the park  
lower costs people to go with  
more ecological diversity  
**more trip planning info**  
bathrooms

- **Major barriers to park visitation include not feeling safe and lack of cleanliness and maintenance.** “Feeling safer” at parks was the most common response, while many “other” responses were not elaborated on. More park amenities (like picnic tables and playgrounds), better accessibility, and more information to help with trip planning were also noted as things to help respondents visit parks more often.

- Respondents are interested in taking transit to parks, but note that more information and more convenient service (including shorter travel times and more frequent service) are needed to do so. Safety was a lesser concern for respondents than convenience and information, but still an important decision-making factor in taking the bus. Furthermore, respondents generally favor an approximately 30-minute-long bus ride to a park, with weekly users willing to ride longer (30-60 minutes) and daily users shorter (20-30 minutes).

“ These three parks feel like some of the largest and most iconic Seattle-area parks... and yet it would take me over an hour to get to any of them via bus from my centrally located Capitol Hill apartment. I would love to spend more time near our incredible lakes and Puget Sound waters, but most days that feels unattainable unless I have an extensive amount of free time to spend on a bus.

- Respondents overwhelmingly indicated interest in visiting some of the larger, regional parks<sup>3</sup> in the county, as indicated in the map here. These parks provide access to the water, scenic views, and opportunities to explore nature and relax.



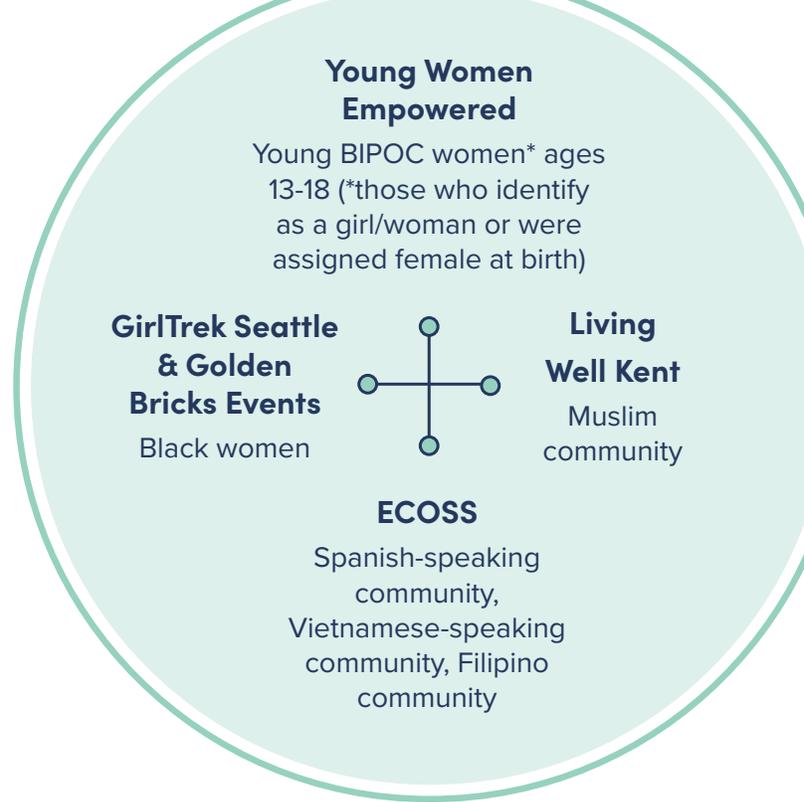
Which parks, trails, and natural areas would you like to visit in King County?

<sup>3</sup> Parks mentioned with greatest frequency (in order) include: Seward Park, Discovery Park, Cougar Mountain, Squak/Tiger Mountain, Seahurst Park, Golden Gardens, and Lincoln Park.

## Partner-led Roundtables

In July 2021, five community-based organizations serving various communities in south King County hosted six roundtables involving more than 60 residents, from youth to the elderly. Roundtable hosts engaged members of Black, Latinx, Vietnamese, Filipino, Muslim, youth, immigrant, and refugee communities, with an emphasis on south King County.

King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society approached roundtable design with the unequal balance of power and funding inherent to government-led community outreach projects keenly in mind. Roundtables hosts knew best how to engage their communities and create a welcoming environment for these conversations. The project team provided roundtable hosts with resources, examples, guiding questions, and staff support, but ultimately gave roundtable hosts flexibility, agency, and the final say in the design of their roundtables. This conscious decision did not go unnoticed by our community partners, and this was a major point of positive feedback. All the roundtable hosts shared that being given agency made them feel supported and inspired to creatively design a roundtable to best engage their communities. They also shared that this was something about this project that stood out to them in comparison to other community outreach efforts they were working on with other agencies, and that it made them feel much more hopeful, excited, and engaged to work on our project.



## Roundtable Question Guide

- What features are important to you when visiting parks, trails, and natural areas? Why are they important?
- Do you take public transit to parks, trails, and natural areas? Why or why not?
- How do you imagine having more inclusive and safe parks, trails, and natural areas?
- How do you imagine having more inclusive and safe public transit?
- How would you design a service to get people in your neighborhood to green spaces?
- What makes it hard to take transit to get to where you want to go?
- If you could give any feedback about transit and parks to King County, what would you say?

# Roundtable Results



**Safety**



**Education  
and  
Outreach**



**Infrastructure**



**Access,  
Representation,  
and Inclusion**



**Engagement  
and  
Accountability**

## Safety

“ Our community expressed that their biggest concerns with visiting parks in the South King County area was the lack of cleanliness and safety.

Throughout both the survey and roundtables, safety emerged as the most significant theme. Community members highlighted concerns about safety, both in parks and on transit, as reasons why they avoid these places. When asked what would encourage them to use

parks and transit more often, improving safety was mentioned most frequently, particularly for BIPOC community members.



### Community Recommendations:

**1 Non-punitive visitor support:** Participants expressed the need for more staff on buses and in parks that are not rooted in policing and punitive measures. Staff in charge of safety should be trained in mental health support and conflict de-escalation strategies. Community members want to see a shift away from a system around fear of penalization towards a culture of community support and offering the right resources.

“ ‘Safety’ on public transit has been done in a way that actually perpetuates trauma and harm for many riders - it needs a complete overhaul and this process should be driven by the community/riders.

**2 Reporting and tracking system for racial conflict with accountability on actions being taken:** Many community members spoke about racially motivated incidents on buses or at parks that made them feel unsafe. To better track these incidents on King County-managed land, community members would like a reporting system where they can log instances of harassment or discrimination. In addition, there should be clarity as to what action King County will take in response to the reporting data to create safer environments.

**3 Inter-county and -agency coordination to address systemic issues:** Safety is not just a parks and transit issue, but a systemic one. Better coordination among departments and agencies could help address these complex issues that aren’t so easily siloed into parks and transit and transcend agency lines. Successes and challenges of increasing safety, security, and belonging in one department can be shared across departments and other decision-making entities.

“ We need bus stop shelters, especially in winter time.

Add more sidewalks and lighting, especially around transit centers.



## Education and Outreach

While there are many quality transit routes to desirable parks, the information doesn't always reach community members, particularly BIPOC communities. Connecting neighborhoods to green spaces goes hand in hand with communicating opportunities with potential visitors, which should be done in culturally relevant ways.

### Community Recommendations:

#### 1 Detailed and inclusive park information:

There is a gap in information about bus routes, park locations, and park and bus navigation. Communities of color want to know more about what is available and how to navigate systems and resources to meet their interests in visiting parks. Community members are looking for more detailed, accessible, and inclusive information that helps them prepare and plan for their trips.

“ Having information available in multiple languages, and can even have QR codes to easily access other languages (if not feasible to show multiple languages on signage, etc.) + audio.

“ Host group tours at parks and help people get familiarized with bus routes and the parks. This is especially important when exploring areas further away from home.

2 Outreach and experiences tailored to BIPOC: Related to information inequities, there is not enough priority on outreach to BIPOC communities that meet them where they are, are in their language, and are relevant to their cultures. One example that highlighted this disparity is in the desires of community members to visit places like Cougar Mountain, Seward Park or Discovery Park, while being unaware of public transit routes that already lead to those destinations.

3 Free and reduced costs for BIPOC: Fare reform was a common topic in the roundtable discussions. Community ideas included guided events with subsidized fares, “free transit day” to encourage public transit use, and systemic reform to remove this financial barrier altogether.

“ Take pictures, take videos. That's important because you don't know what you're walking into or what to expect. Even just showing what the trailhead and transportation looks like. It can be intimidating, it feels risky going out on an adventure not knowing what to expect. Have more education and visuals on what to expect. How long is the ride? Is there A/C? Things like this would make it more comfortable.

“ Provide 360-degree videos of park entrances to take self-guided tours of parks.





# Infrastructure

In the survey and the roundtables, participants shared several infrastructure-related barriers to feeling safer, more welcome, and more likely to use parks and transit. Some people lived in neighborhoods that were simply



“ Participants expressed enjoying night workouts outdoors, but because the lights go off so early it becomes unsafe for them to do so.

too far from parks they wanted to enjoy or where the lack of infrastructure, like sidewalks, lighting, and proper bus shelters, made transit feel unsafe and inconvenient. The desire for better park maintenance was shared among many, represented by clean bathrooms and facilities, updated playgrounds, addressing the complex challenge of homelessness, and more.

## Community Recommendations:

**1 Expanded Metro service:** Community members want more routes and frequent and convenient Metro service as a way to increase use of transit overall, and use of transit to parks specifically. Many existing bus routes to parks simply take too long

“ Provide direct routes from major transit hubs to popular park destinations — like Trailhead Direct but to city parks.

or require too many transfers. For BIPOC and women, many indicated feeling unsafe waiting for long periods (alone) at a bus stop without shelter or lighting to improve the environment. A [recent report](#) by Disability Rights Washington found that many disabled people feel similarly unsafe waiting alone at a bus stop.

“ Better access for disabled people. In other parks outside of Seattle, there are swings that can be used by people and kids with wheelchairs. Machines to work out by yourself in the park. Swings for moms that can be used with their babies.

**2 More amenities and better maintenance:** Community members consistently shared that cleanliness is an issue at parks and that more clean and accessible restrooms are needed, especially in urban areas. Participants recognized that closing bathrooms is not good for anyone, including people experiencing homelessness. People also wanted more lighting to help with safety and expanded hours to help with usage outside of the traditional 9-5 schedule, which isn't inclusive of everyone's work schedule.

**3 Co-design with community:** Community members shared an interest in working with public agencies to help design spaces that work for their communities. Involving community members in any projects or decisions that affect them from beginning to end is key to building trust and meeting the needs of the community.

“ Seek community input on the design of parks. Co-design.



# Access, Representation, and Inclusion

Equity in the outdoors and on transit means so much more than providing physical access. When these spaces are truly for the people, community members will want to visit and will feel a sense of belonging. Creating inclusive and welcoming spaces for people of all identities is a key prerequisite for equitable access.

“ Provide more areas with even terrain for folks who are disabled.



“ County’s parks & park systems have a lot of work to do to make the outdoor spaces feel comfortable for all people.

## Community Recommendations:

**1 Inter-county and -agency coordination to address systemic issues:** Like safety, inclusion goes beyond the scope of what an individual department or agency can fix. However, King County can work among departments and with other jurisdictions

to share existing data and community feedback, as well as strategies for what has been successful and where there have been challenges. It’s encouraging to see county-wide efforts, such as the [Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan](#) and the [Coalition Against Hate and Bias](#). Lessons learned in broader efforts should be applied to what happens in parks and on transit to create more inclusive environments and reduce systemic failures.

**2 Hire folks from BIPOC communities to serve their communities:** Community members mentioned that they don’t go to parks because they don’t see people who look like them, and they don’t always feel comfortable asking staff on site for

help because of race, language, and culture differences. To invest in communities and encourage residents to utilize these amenities, participants recommended hiring staff from within those communities.

**3 Work with Indigenous peoples on shared land management and land-back initiatives:** It is necessary to talk about Indigenous values and land management when discussing outdoor equity. Community members recommend collaborating directly with the Duwamish Tribe and other local tribes on respectful land stewardship and possible land-back initiatives. Working with the King County Native American Leadership Council, King County leadership, and the county Tribal Relations Liaison to dive more deeply into this topic would be beneficial.

“ Trained park guides stationed in parks to lead activities, answer questions, and help folks engage with the space in a way that feels right to them. It’s critical that these folks are from the community and rooted in justice and equity to support a wide variety of culturally relevant park uses.

“ Drivers of different ethnicities – I will feel safer and more comfortable asking for information from a driver who may speak Spanish or be part of another ethnic group.



# Engagement and Accountability

Community members want more direct ways to engage with King County leadership to have their ideas heard. Communities often have the best solutions for their neighborhoods and would like a system of accountability in place to meet their needs. To build trust between agencies and communities, there needs to be ongoing compensated collaboration and communication.

“ Listen to the community, show up in community spaces, set up structures to build trust and accountability.

“ Want to move towards eradicating barriers instead of just removing barriers.

## Community Recommendations:

**1 Compensate community participation:** Participants in this project appreciated getting compensated for their leadership and knowledge, a practice which King County should continue. This project paid partners \$75 per hour for their time on the roundtables and survey and \$10 for community members to take the survey.

“ Have a lot to say, have much more to say, this should just be the beginning. Want to keep speaking & sharing. To be able to get to the point of being paid for our opinions is a hallelujah moment!

**2 Availability and accountability of leadership:** Community members would like more opportunities to interact with leadership and decision makers. Many of these conversations are already happening within communities and decision-makers should come to those meetings. In addition to having

conversations, partners discussed the importance of holding decision-makers accountable to community feedback so there is a positive impact on the people giving their thoughts.

“ The County needs to invest in long-term relationships with community-based organizations so these conversations can be ongoing, rather than just one-and-done projects periodically. The County also needs to demonstrate a commitment to actually listening to the community, and have structures of accountability in place.

**3 Non-transactional community outreach:** Sustained, consistent engagement should be regular practice with communities. Partners want to be part of ongoing and connected efforts to help their communities, not one-off projects when leadership is looking for

feedback. This will require resources and time allocated for relationship building through a collaborative approach that acknowledges power dynamics.

“ Longer form engagement. The short time frames of roundtables or focus groups make it hard to dig into these complex topics and build relationships.



## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

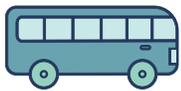
### Key Takeaways

The community-led roundtables and online survey results provided valuable insights into community needs and preferences to increase equitable access to parks and transit across King County, which are further detailed in the upcoming sections. Some important overarching takeaways from community feedback include:



**1**

**People value parks and want them to be safe and welcoming for their communities.** Parks are important community spaces and we should work to make them as easy to enjoy as possible.



**2**

**Riding transit can be difficult in general, and especially to parks.** Participants talked about bus stops being too far away, having to transfer too many times, and safety concerns as reasons why they don't ride.



**3**

**Safety in parks and on transit can be a deciding factor for using them.** Access to parks and transit is more than being able to physically reach them. Certain populations may experience societal factors that make them feel unsafe and discourage them from getting on transit or making it to a park in the first place.



**4**

**Community members want more opportunities to engage with decision-makers and hold them accountable to community needs.** Participants were excited to be compensated for their thoughts and look forward to continuing collaboration with the County and holding leadership accountable to community ideas. They expressed that community members already have creative ideas for solutions to these issues, but didn't have sufficient access to decision makers and ability to collaborate on strategy and planning of new programs.



**5**

**Intersections of identities affect how we interact with and use parks and transit.** Addressing concerns of safety and inclusion is going to take more than a one-size-fits-all approach. The struggles and experiences of all community members are so unique that the creation of policies, services, and programs must be informed by and targeted toward each different community.



**6**

**Incentivized participation encouraged more in-depth conversation and involvement.** Community members appreciated being compensated for their time, thoughts and expertise.

## OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society are grateful for the involvement and engagement of the 11 community-based organizations, 10 roundtable hosts, 60 roundtable participants, and nearly 400 survey respondents that participated in this Community Needs Assessment. This report captures feedback directly from the communities served by the community-based organizations that represent Black, Latinx, Asian, Muslim, youth, disabled, immigrant, and refugee communities, with an emphasis in south King County.

Through this work, King County, in partnership with community leaders, organizers, and entities across the county, can continue to deliver on its commitment to improve equitable access to open space, regional trails, and transit. This project illuminates critical needs and preferences of communities in south King County and uplifts innovative solutions to address inequities and other challenges directly from community members.

Early opportunities exist to use the information presented in this report to help inform existing and future King County policy, programs, and partnerships. Some specific opportunities to utilize the data and community recommendations are detailed below.

## Existing Opportunities

### King County Open Space Plan

King County Parks is in the process of updating its [Open Space Plan](#), which provides the policy framework for the County's acquisition, planning, development, stewardship, maintenance, management, and funding of its complex system of 205 parks, 175 miles of regional trails, and 32,000 acres of open space. The information presented in this report can specifically inform any County goals and policies related to safety, inclusion, and equitable access.



## King County Parks Programming and Partnership Opportunities

Community members and groups are eager to develop innovative solutions to make parks safer and accessible for all. The County could work with some of the partners involved in this project to develop programming (e.g., nature walks) that could activate parks and provide more inclusive programming to meet community needs. Innovative programs like the County's recent programming at Lake Geneva Park, its pilot trailhead ambassador effort in summer 2021 with Washington Department of Natural Resources, and its Park and Trail Ambassador programs could serve as pilot efforts to build on.



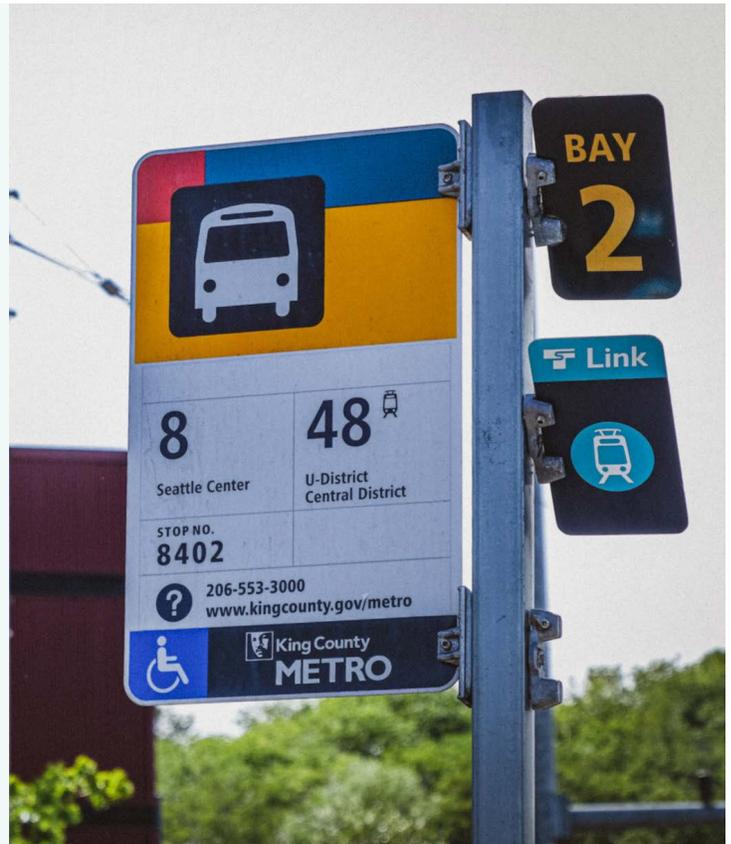
## King County Metro Trailhead Direct 2022 Season

King County Parks and Metro have the opportunity to reinstate the transit-to-trails program, [Trailhead Direct](#), in 2022.

This shuttle service fills an important transportation gap for communities wanting to access nearby parks and trails in the I-90 Corridor. As the County plans for 2022, information presented in this report can be used to inform transit stops, marketing and promotional strategy, and partnership investments.

## King County Metro Via Shuttle Service

King County Metro has made important investments in shuttle services to fill transportation gaps, especially in south King County. The [Via to Transit on-demand service](#) connects riders to and from transit and community hubs in four service areas in the communities of Othello, Tukwila, Rainier Beach/Skyway, and Renton Highlands. The service can provide direct service to Kubota Garden and Seward Park, two popular parks according to our survey results. Metro and Parks can collaborate further on using innovative shuttle services like Via to access other popular park and recreation destinations within or near these service areas in the future and collaboratively promote the service to priority populations.



## King County Metro Safety, Security, and Fare Enforcement (SaFE) Reform

Metro has embarked on an effort to evaluate its safety enforcement practices and shift to sharing power with communities, particularly BIPOC who have been most negatively affected by harmful enforcement. Many of our partner conversations centered on community safety; partner ideas on increasing safety and the process for engaging with communities could be useful in carrying out the SaFE reform.

## New Opportunities

### King County Metro Pilot Program Opportunities

This community needs assessment elevates popular community destinations King County Metro and King County Parks could consider for future pilot service routes. Leveraging transit hubs and making easier connections to parks and open space that provide opportunities for water access, scenic views, and nature exploration can provide a good starting place for the County, in addition to other innovative pilot program solutions.

*See Appendix for pilot route ideas.*



### King County Metro, King County Parks, Seattle Department of Transportation Public Awareness Opportunities

The lack of information about how community members can use current transit routes to access parks and open space is a clear opportunity emerging from this outreach effort. Popular parks, such as Lincoln Park in West Seattle, Discovery Park in north Seattle, and Seward Park on Lake Washington, were all indicated as popular destinations for community members, and all of these parks are currently served by transit. A targeted campaign promoting these existing opportunities could serve as a first step while agencies work together to create new service routes and stops.

King County Parks, ECOSS, and The Wilderness Society are hopeful this report can serve as a foundation for sustained collaborative action to better meet the open space and transit needs of south King County and deliver on the County's commitment to advancing equity and justice for all communities.



The  
Wilderness  
Society



King County

**PARKS**

Your Big Backyard

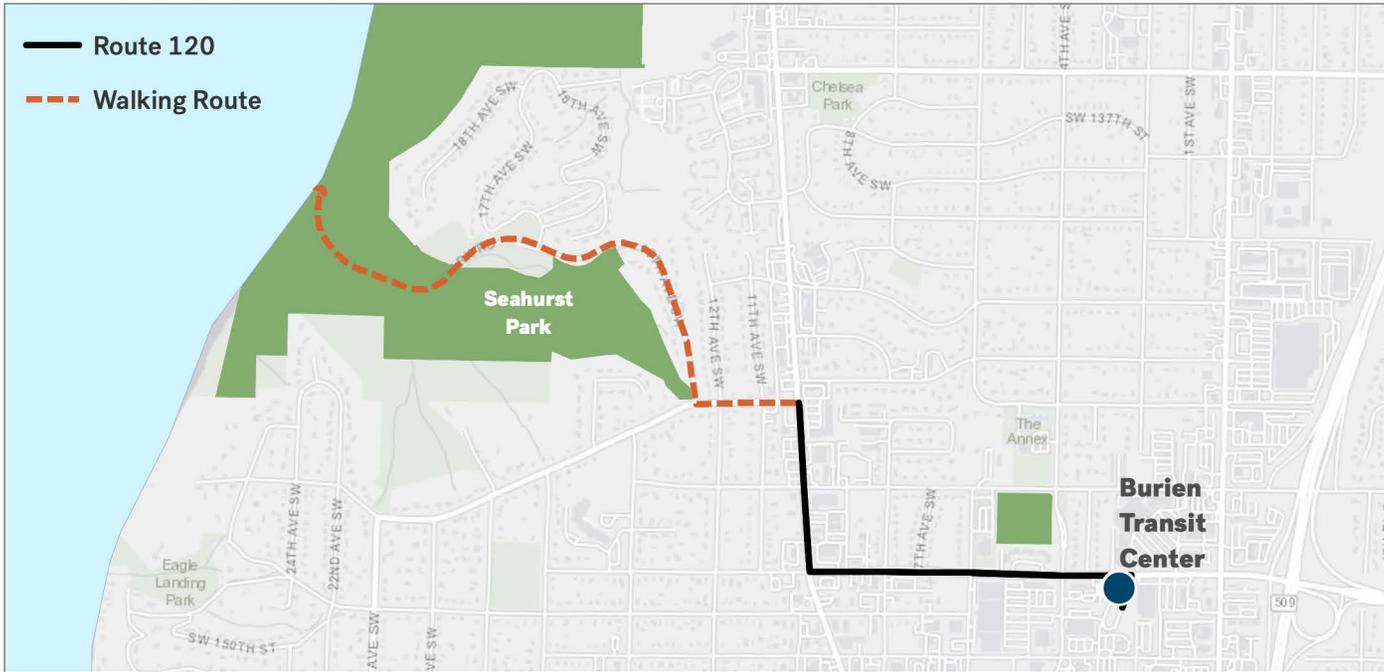


Sustainable Solutions for All



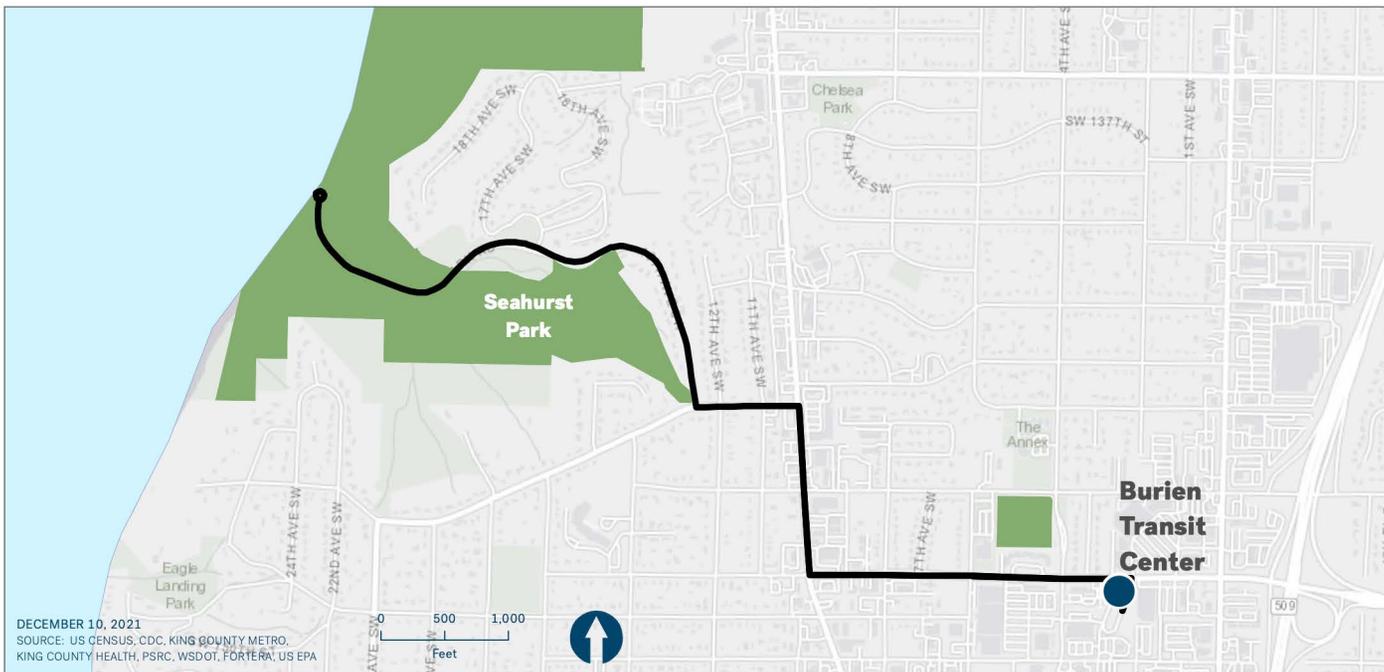
# Appendix

# Burien Transit Center to Seahurst Park



## Current Route

Riders can take Route 120 from the Burien Transit Center to SW 144th St and Ambaum Blvd SW, then have to walk more than 20 minutes to get into the park



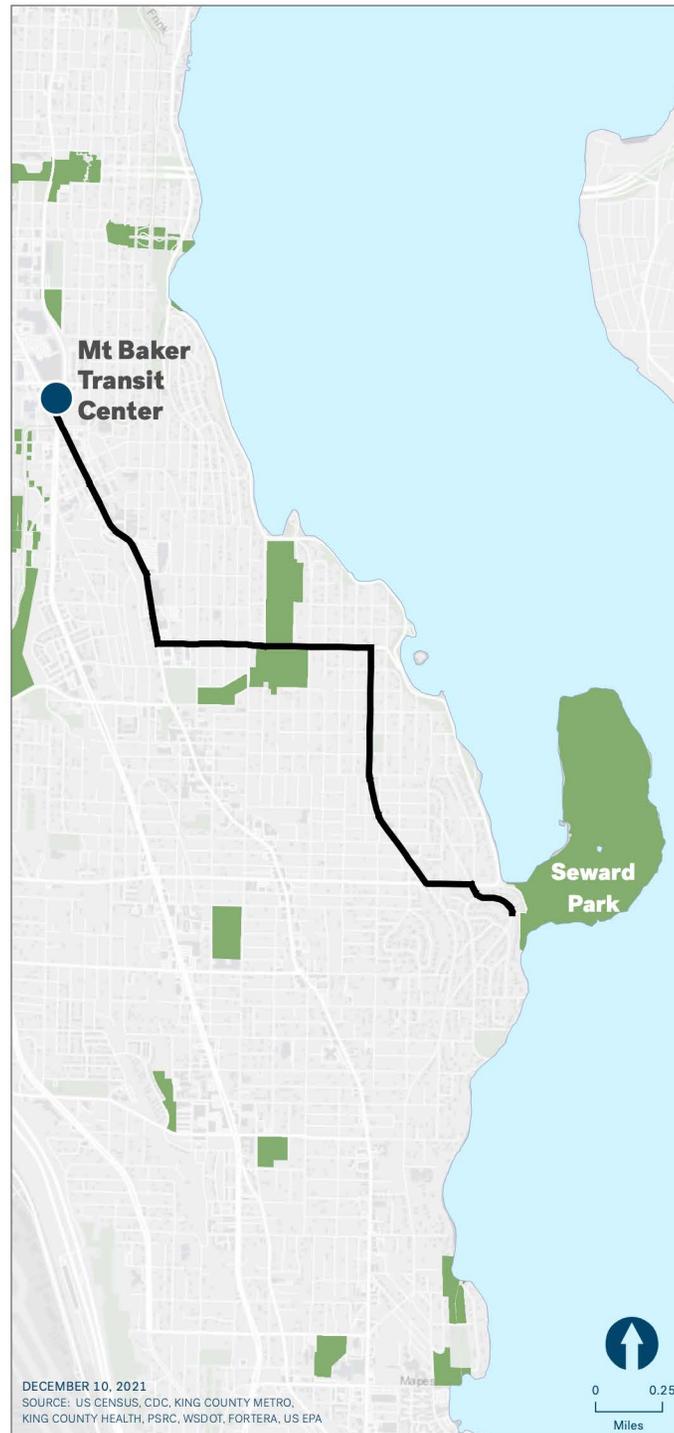
## Proposed Route

A shuttle or extension to Route 120 could be added to take riders all the way to the parking lot adjacent to the beach

# Mount Baker Transit Center to Seward Park

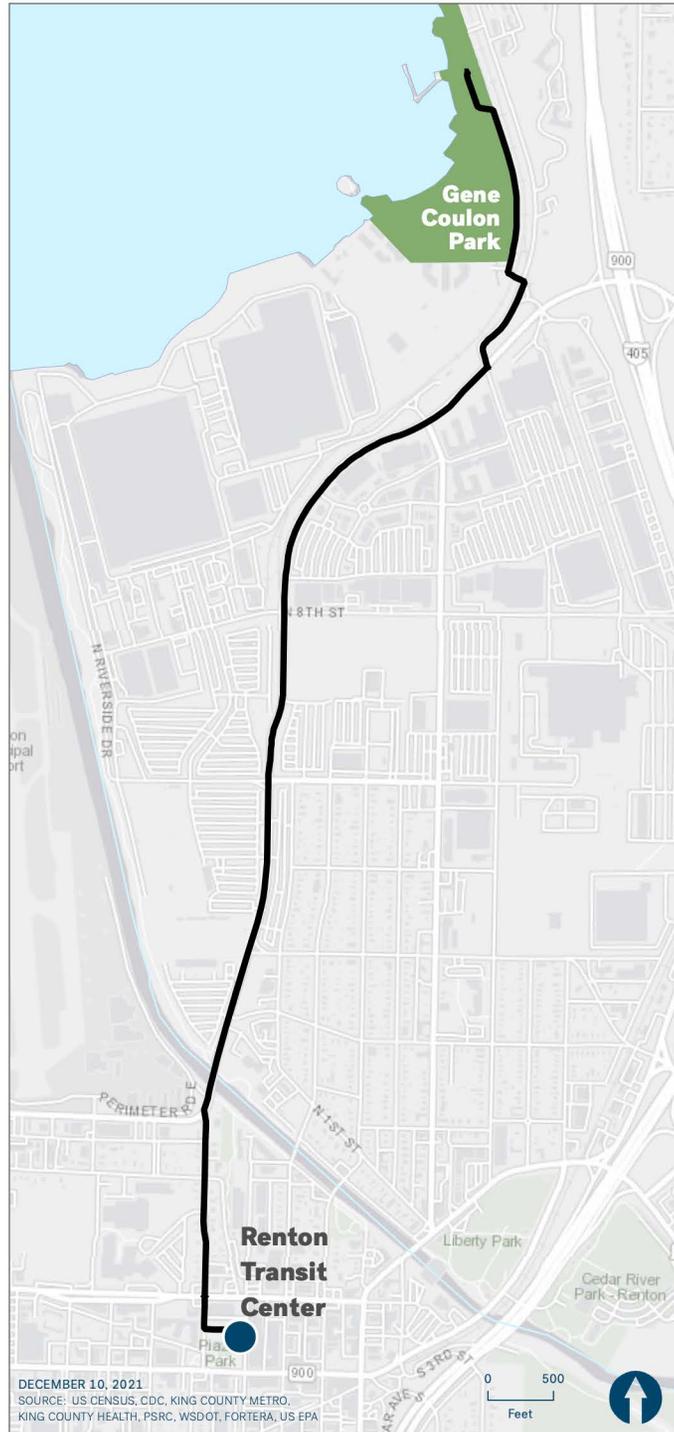
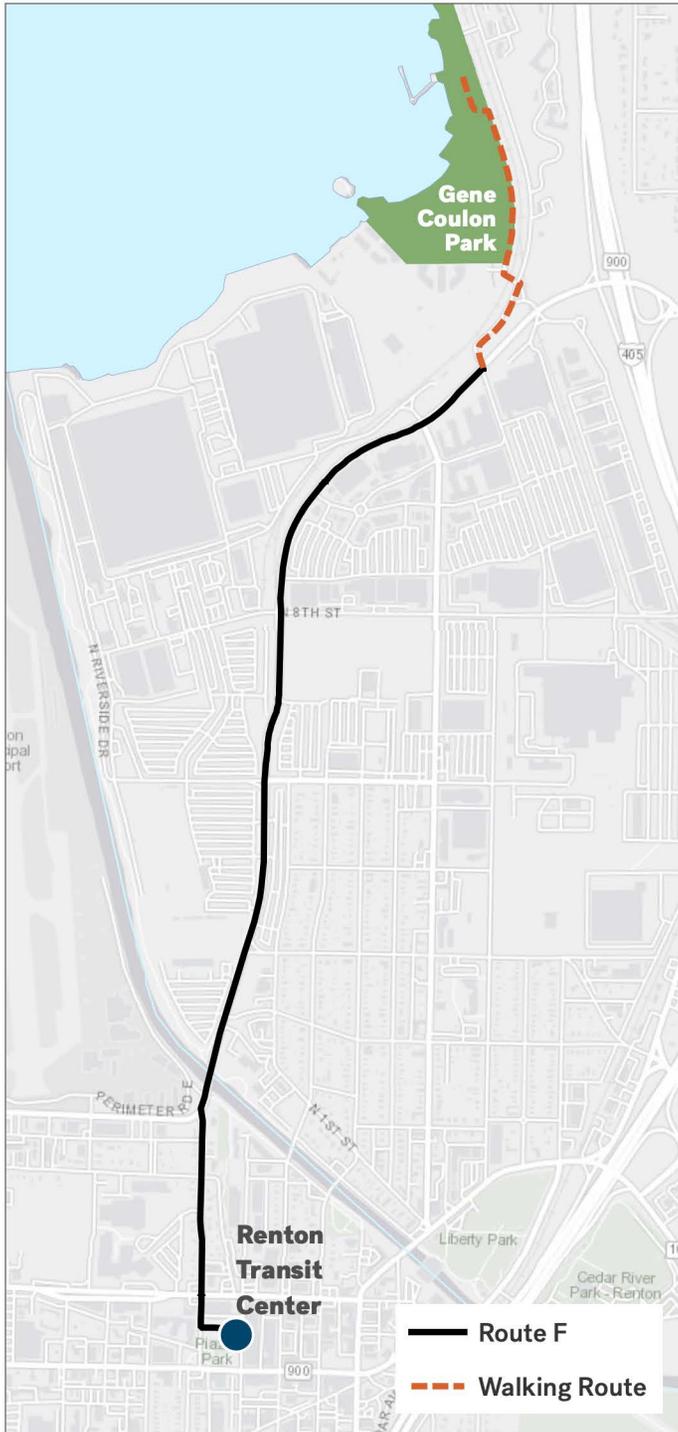
## Current Route (left)

Riders can take Route 7 from the Mt Baker Transit Center to S Genesse St and Rainier Ave S, transfer to Route 50, then have to walk 6 minutes to get into the park



## Proposed Route (right)

A modification to Route 50 or an entirely new route with direct service from the Transit Center to the park could cut the total travel time by more than half



# Renton Transit Center to Gene Coulon Park

## Current Route (left)

Riders can take Route F from the Renton Transit Center to Garden Ave N, then have to walk a little over half a mile to reach park facilities

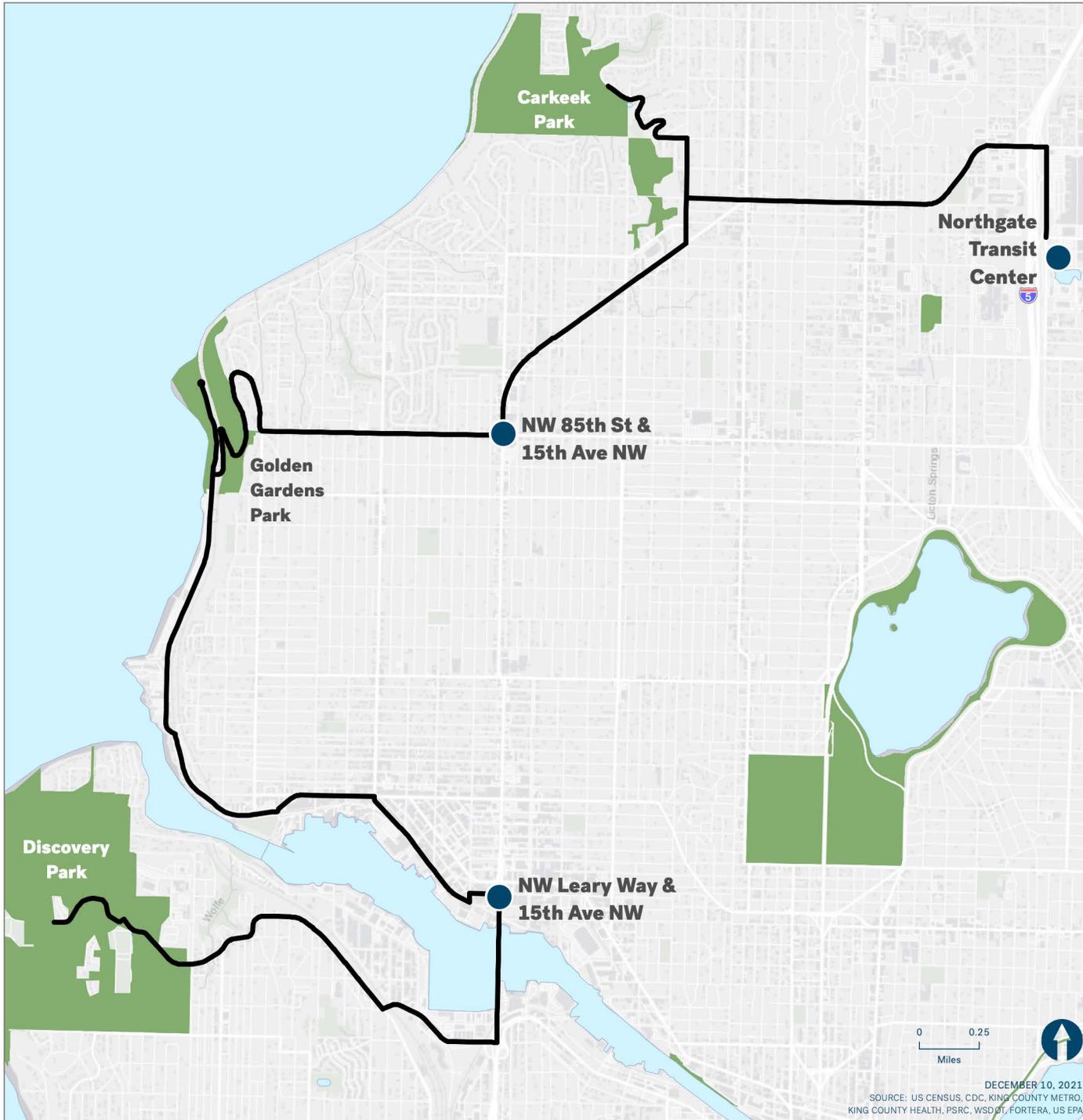
## Proposed Route (right)

An extension to Route F could be added to take riders all the way to the parking lot adjacent to the beach

# North Seattle Loop

## Proposed Route

This route would originate and terminate at the Northgate Transit Center and connect Carkeek Park, Golden Gardens Park, and Discovery Park. There would be a stop between Carkeek and Golden Gardens, at NW 85th St & 15th Ave NW, and an additional stop between Golden Gardens and Discovery at NW Leary Way & 15th Ave NW.



# South King County Loop

## Proposed Route

This route would originate and terminate at the Federal Way Transit Center and connect Steel Lake Park, Saltwater State Park, Redondo Waterfront Park, Dumas Bay Park, and Dash Point State Park. There would be a stop between Saltwater State Park and Redondo Waterfront Park, at 16th Ave S & S 272nd St, and an additional stop between Redondo Waterfront Park and Dumas Bay Park, at 1st Ave SW & SW 301st St.

